Chicanas in the 80's: UNSETTLED ISSUES

E
184
M5
N24
1982

Chicanas in the 80's: UNSETTLED ISSUES

by

Mujeres en Marcha
University of California, Berkeley

NACS 11TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
TEMPE, ARIZONA 1982

CHICANO STUDIES LIBRARY PUBLICATIONS UNIT
UC Berkeley

Theology Library
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
AT CLAREMONT
California

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This monograph was prepared by Teresa Córdova
with the assistance of Gloria Cuádraz.

Thanks to the Chicano Studies Library Publications Unit, in particular to Carolyn Soto whose efficiency has made this monograph possible.

© 1983 by Mujeres en Marcha

Chicano Studies Library Publications Unit
3404 Dwinelle Hall
University of California, Berkeley 94720

In virtually all fields of human endeavor, there is abounding evidence to support that women are consistently relegated to a status of inferiority and submission. This is true whether we examine the worlds of labor, law, health, education, the family, politics, mass media, or history. Hegemony based on gender remains deeply embedded in all societal spheres and requires the continued perseverance of women and men to reverse a system of domination that is detrimental to the liberation of all people.

In keeping with a long tradition of struggle by women to assert their dignity, we, as members of *Mujeres en Marcha* at the University of California, Berkeley, organized a panel discussion for the 1982 National Association for Chicano Studies conference in Tempe, Arizona. The purposes of the panel were 1) to generate discussion around significant issues of gender inequality that appeared to be unsettled, and 2) to generate suggestions of action to remedy the problems that women in NACS face in their attempts to be recognized as serious scholars.

Certainly, we were not exhaustive in the enumeration of issues, nor did we intend to be. Similarly, we were aware that the issues raised were particular to Chicana women in institutions of higher education, and that a vast number of pressing issues remain to be addressed adequately for women in the Chicano community at large. The panel addressed an academic audience. This report continues in the same vein.

Three issues of concern were identified as topics for presentation:

1. For a number of years, Chicanas have heard claims that a concern with issues specifically affecting Chicanas is merely a distraction/diversion from the liberation of Chicano people as a whole. What are the issues that arise when women are asked to separate their exploitation as women from the other forms of oppression that we experience?

2. Chicanas are confronted daily by the limitations of being a woman in this patriarchal society; the attempt to assert these issues around "sexism" are often met with resistance and scorn. What are some of the major difficulties in relations amongst ourselves? How are the relationships

INTRODUCTION: UNSETTLED ISSUES

Moderator: Teresa Córdova

She is the Chingada.
She loses her name;
She is no one;
She disappears into nothingness;
She is nothingness.
And yet, she is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition.
The Chingada is the Mother forcibly opened, violated, deceived.
The hijo de la Chingada is the offspring of violation,
abduction or deceit.1

She is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition. She personifies and exemplifies the condition of the Mexican woman. Chingada--silent, deceptive, violative, degrading...

As Adelaida del Castillo reminds us,

> ...History is notorious for depicting the female as being one of the primary causes for man's failures... Woman is perceived as being one whose innately negative nature only serves to stagnate man, if not corrupt him entirely. So just as Eve was chosen long ago by misogynistic men to represent the embodiment of 'the root of all evil' for western man, Mexico's first and foremost exceptional heroine Doña Marina la Malinche now embodies female negativity for Mexican culture.2

But, as Del Castillo so finely points out, there are many factors that are not usually taken into account in the understanding of La Malinche. For example, she goes on to list a number of them:

---

1. Octavio Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude,* Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1950, p. 81.
2. Adelaida del Castillo, "Malintzin Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into A New Perspective," in Rosaura Sánchez and Rosa Martínez Cruz (eds.) *Essays on la Mujer,* Anthology No. 1, Chicano Studies Center Publications, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977, p. 139.

--Importance of Quetzalcoatl
--The Aztec religion
--The political milieu of the Aztec Empire
at the time of the conquest
--Marina's personal life
--Her actual deeds in the conquest of Mexico, and finally
--Speculation based on all the above concerning
Doña Marina's motives for having involved
herself in the conquest. (Ibid., p. 124-125)

The point is, mysogynistic historians have created a myth of La Malinche which continues to haunt the Mexican woman. The point is, the myth of La Malinche is the symbol of the deep-rooted assumptions *about* women that women must live with each and every day: the myths of passivity, deception--or worse yet--insignificance.

We are here today to further the casting off of these myths. We are here because Mexican women are neither inherently passive, deceptive nor insignificant.

Commentary: Del Castillo's article is not only finely researched and written, but it makes an important contribution to our understanding of Malintzin Tenepal and to our understanding of the birth of the Mexican people. Most importantly, she challenges the long-held belief that the roots of our solitude are found in a violated woman.

Once we understand Del Castillo's argument--that Malintzin's actions were motivated by her enduring faith--then we may further understand that the conquest is best understood without the damning of La Malinche. Yet because La Malinche has been the symbol of the violation, there have been accompanying myths that befall our niñas. One need not be aware of the damning of La Malinche to be damned along with her.

The extent to which the Mexican woman is considered passive, deceptive or insignificant is not easily agreed upon. Some would argue that within some roles, we are active and significant and that we are the epitome of virtue. Indeed, we speak of a model of virtue as seen through the Virgin Lady of Guadalupe. Often, the Mexican woman is confronted with two images of herself: the madonna or the whore.

Indeed, our choices have been limited. Chicanas across the United States are challenging the limitations set, not so much by hombres, but by history. Because our challenge runs counter to the very veins of tradition, it is difficult and painful. But it is a challenge we believe will supercede limitations and allow for exponential growth of todo nuestro pueblo.

What happens when we overstep traditional roles and stereotypes? We are told we are divisive, that we work against the struggles toward ending racism. We are told that we are aggressive and castrating. We are told that we are products of middle-class feminism. We are told this and much more. But all that we are told serves to diffuse the understanding of the imbalance of power that is a function of male dominance--or patriarchy.

The issues involved are not easy ones to solve or to grapple with. However, they are issues that must not be avoided. We are here today to further our discussion as women and men dedicated to the liberation of all oppressed peoples. What is most important to us here today, is that we all join in this discussion. We have structured our roundtable in a way that we hope is conducive to full participation.

May I now introduce women from the University of California, Berkeley and members of Mujeres en Marcha: Sylvia Lizárraga, Literature, Chicano Studies; Deena González, History; Teresa Córdova, Sociology; Linda Facio, Sociology; Margarita Decierdo, Sociology; Gloria Cuádraz, Sociology, Lita de la Torre, Agricultural Economics.

TOPIC I:

IS THE CONCERN WITH ISSUES SPECIFICALLY AFFECTING CHICANAS AND RAISED BY CHICANAS MERELY A DISTRACTION OR DIVERSION FROM THE LIBERATION OF CHICANO PEOPLE AS A WHOLE?

Speaker: Margarita Decierdo

Eleanor Leacock wrote in an anthology of Latin American women:

> Although women bear the heaviest burden of national and of class oppression, they are often told that they must subvert their own cause at this time in the interest of the "larger" goals of the national, racial and class liberation from exploitation.3

What are the issues that arise when women are asked to separate their exploitation as women from the other forms of oppression that we experience? During the 1960's, while we struggled together against the structures that oppressed the Chicano/a community, the Chicana "had been cautioned to wait and fight for her cause at a later time for fear of dividing the Chicano Movement." Of course, this was unacceptable--and basically the issue evolved as to which of the two areas of discrimination the Chicana should adopt as priority--sexism or racism. Ana Nieto Gomez elaborates on the situation:

> Many loyalists felt that these complaints from women were potentially destructive and could only divide the Chicano Movement. If sexual inequalities existed, they were an in-house problem which could be dealt with later. However, right then and there, there were more important priorities to attend to: Vietnam, La Huelga, police brutality, etc.4

---

3. Eleanor Leacock. "Women, Development, and Anthropological Facts and Fictions," in *Women in Latin America: An Anthology from Latin American Perspectives,* by Latin American Perspectives, Riverside, California, 1979, p.8.
4. Martha P. Cotera. *Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.*, Statehouse Printing, Austin, Texas, 1976.

Well-known Chicana activist Yolanda Nava, for example, severely criticized this posture and stated, "It is unacceptable to separate racial-sexual and economic struggle in a heirarchical list of priorities. It must be realized that it is illogical to ask a woman to ignore and postpone her struggle as a woman."5 Thus, our arguments were thought to be relevant only to Anglo women. Social and organizational ostracism were effectively used in the isolation of Chicana women. Anti-sexist criticism was interpreted as hatred of men, and women were warned: "El problema es el gabacho, no es el macho."

Thus, women, with or without their Chicano male counterparts, continued their struggle and began organizing to deal effectively with issues that concerned women. While the Chicano Movement activist strategized in dealing with the struggle against race and class domination, it neglected to embrace socio-economic, political issues critical to women--health, poverty, forced sterilization, racism, employment, child care, education, abortion rights, etc. We felt, therefore, that the fundamental criticism of the Chicano Movement was that it did not adequately incorporate the process of political strategies relevant to the Chicana. In other words, the movement could not survive merely on issues to liberate our people. The Movement, because it did not place nor identify the socio-political root of women's oppression, did not achieve as much as it would have if it had seriously dealt with the question of sexism. The political mobilization of women had to be linked with the liberation of a people and a class inasmuch as they were an integral part of these. By not understanding the dynamics of power, we failed to understand our own oppression.

TOPIC I: DISCUSSION

An audience member opened the discussion by pointing to an example that highlighted some of the contradictions of the 60's. One of her students did an analysis of Black writings in the 60's that were statements of rebellion against dominance. These writings, however, were replete with passages about rape--passages where raping white

5. Ibid.

women was the symbolic representation of striking out at the system. At the same time, nothing positive was said about their own Black women.

We have seen this depiction most painfully when it has been unaccompanied by respect for an ethnic/racial group's own women, usually absent because of a general disregard for women. Most important, this thrashing is futile, and achieves nothing except the demeaning of women (including their own).

The contradiction here is important because at one level we see the calling for the liberation and self-determination of people, "but while at the same time, talking about participating in very reactionary and oppressive kinds of behavior." Audience member pointed out that "this kind of posture would be heavily criticized now" but serves as an example of the kind of contradictions that were prevalent in the "60"s.

* * * * * * * * * * *

A man stated, "I agree with your analysis that the Chicano Movement did not deal with sexism and as a result we did not accomplish much. I would generally state that it *did* deal with a lot of issues very adequately."

Commentary: There was an indication that there was shared sentiment on three points: 1) that the Chicano Movement fell short of greater heights because of its exclusion of women; 2) that credit is due for the accomplishments which were attained, with the necessary help of women; 3) that the time has come for the Chicano Movement (and we assume there is still one operating) to incorporate fully the needs and voices of mujeres.

* * * * * * * * * * *

How is it true that we, together, as men and women, can begin to deal with feminism on a daily basis, especially in terms of organizational aspects?"

Panelist: "That's why we are here today. What you ask is an essential question and will need to be answered in process. That is, what we do today should be seen as the beginning of an ongoing effort."

Commentary: The question proposed here is essential and the answer is to be found in continuing conversations and work among us. The importance of the panel is our pledge to work together against a condition that leaves us as oppressed people. Still, some immediate suggestions were made for organizational amendments and strategies within the very structure of NACS.

A suggestion was made that decisions should be made in the plenary session to deal with issues of sexism. A panelist pointed out that we must keep in mind that women are not generally present at these meetings and that the men themselves should take the initiative to make progress rather than lean on a few token women who must not only bear the burden of responsibility for the issues of sexism, but bear the consequences as well.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

A male member of the audience responded by saying that before a man could do this, he had to be educated. Several responded to this by saying that sexism has been seen as a women's issue and not as a people's issue. "To say that women should educate men and make them responsible, not only for themselves, but for the men also, is ludicrous."

Panelist replied that it was a man himself who had to see to it that he was educated. It was clearly pointed out that "*It was not the task of women to educate men.* All we could do was to bring the awareness of what was going on. As women, we have discussed the issue among ourselves at length and essentially feel that it is a shared responsibility and that we want you to be responsible for educating yourselves."

Commentary: The men who raised this issue did so with sincerity. How do men become educated enough to rally against gender dominance without relying on token women who must bear the responsibility of raising issues and the consequences, once they have done so? The response to this was likewise sincere. The point being made is somewhat similar to that which was made to white people when they said they wanted to be educated about us. What we said then was, "Get off your high horse and try to know us as we are." "Don't make any assumptions about us on the basis of your stereotypes." "Listen to us, so that we may speak." Women are saying that men should assume responsibility for their own education. Read the literature of the feministas, hear us when we speak. Don't assume we are wrong or that our concerns are not legitimate before we have spoken.

The man was raising, I believe, an additional point. Shouldn't the women be providing the leadership? If this is so, then we now urge each of you to take seriously our concerns.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

One man stated that acts of sexism were often unconscious processes and often men are not aware that their words or actions may be reinforcing their dominance over the submission of women. Often these actions/words are a result of male privilege and deeply rooted assumptions. Our task now is to identify and challenge those assumptions and not to assume that *it must always be women who will identify and challenge sexist movements.*

Another man suggested that the breaking of the reproduction of dominance additionally requires that men talk about it; This includes talking about it among themselves.

--"What should we do, form our own groups?"

--"Yes."

--"What happens if we arrive at different conclusions... What happens if we give our sincere evaluation but we arrive at different conclusions?"

--"Then we have an ongoing dialogue. The answer to this question is solved in practice. We can no longer leave it at a hypothetical situation. We are tired of that."

Commentary: A sincere evaluation does not necessarily result in an accurate one. At the same time, a desire to make a sincere evaluation reflects a concern for its importance. If we imagine those conclusions to be drawn around a sense of dignity and for the liberation of both women and men in mind, then the conclusions cannot be so far apart.

* * * * * * * * * * *

The remainder of discussion on this topic evolved around sexism in NACS. A woman raised the issue of child care as an example of an issue that demands shared responsibility. In its ten year history, NACS has never provided child care (except once at Berkeley). The handling of such issues as these requires shared responsibility and creativity.

* * * * * * * * * * *

It was suggested that we should ask the following series of questions:

1. Has there been any progressive change since the 1960s?
2. Where have the improvements been since the 1960s?
3. What are the areas we need to work on further?

* * * * * * * * * * *

"NACS to a certain degree has done much to break down some of the sexual barriers, but still has some way to go." Women need to participate more on panels and committees, and as FOCO representatives. Women are more apt to do this when they receive support not only from women, but also from men--without condescension.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Women's mobility in the world of academia (among other places) is limited, both structurally and systematically. We do not have, for example, tenured Chicanas with a solid institutional base and very few who have solid histories of publishing. We need a commitment in our universities to recruit women and to support them once they are there. The networkings of women are important in these endeavors.

Commentary: There is much to be done in the struggle against sexism within the National Association of Chicano Studies. The apparent willingness of those present to do so, suggests that change may be forthcoming. It should be noted that the round table presented by Mujeres en Marcha was well attended and enthusiastically received. Such a mood leaves us optimistic that there are increasingly more women and men ready to seek the necessary change.

TOPIC II:

CHICANAS ARE CONFRONTED DAILY BY THE LIMITATION OF BEING WOMEN IN THIS PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: THE ATTEMPT TO ASSERT ISSUES AROUND "SEXISM" IS OFTEN MET WITH RESISTANCE AND SCORN. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES IN THE ARENA OF RELATIONS AMONG OURSELVES? HOW ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS OF WOMEN TO WOMEN AND MEN TO MEN AFFECTED? HOW DO WE OVER COME THE CONSTRAINTS OF SEXISM?

Speaker: Gloria Holguín Cuádraz

Whether subtle or blatant, sexism is our reality.
IT IS ALSO YOURS

Whether intentional or non-intentional, the fact remains that Chicanas face sexism on a daily basis. Just as our Anglo counterparts hesitate to deal with their racism, so must Chicanos and Chicanas learn to deal with their sexism. The examples are numerous; this is just one taken from a Latino magazine describing its monthly cover girl:

> It's very, very difficult to imagine Patty Kotero barefoot and pregnant. Those sultry eyes were surely meant to gaze provocatively at the world from the cover of a glossy magazine; that lush body with fat only in the *right* places and just a hint of clothing to cover them must certainly have been put here to inspire women's envy and men's fantasies.
>
> She seems to be the perfect Latina, the one who can make tortillas all day and never has a headache at night!6

6. *Q-Vol For Today's Latino,* May/June, 1981, Vol.3, no.1, p. 9.

One may ask of this portrayal: Is it intentional or non-intentional? Given what this perpetuates, does it make *any difference?* This is just one example of many. It just so happens to be a blatant one. But, how many times has the sexism been so subtle that when you had a few minutes to reflect on the interaction--you realized that it was sexist in nature?

The question we raise is:
HOW DO WE DEAL WITH THE SEXISM?

As we see it, Chicanas have two options.

ONE: WE CAN REMAIN SILENT

TWO: WE CAN CONFRONT IT

Yet in remaining silent, we:

1. Remain frustrated and internalize our oppression;
2. Reinforce a false sense of manhood;
3. Reinforce the oppression of both men and women, because ultimately, our struggle for liberation suffers.

Moreover, what are the consequences when we *do confront* the sexism? As we see it, the initial thing which occurs is that we become labeled. Be it as a "women's libber" or as a "radical feminist," by virtue of the labels imposed upon us and the reputation which accompanies it, often we are not only alienated but also ostracized from the "OLD BOYS NETWORK."

Commentary: Gloria is making the point that we, as women, are continually faced with instances of sexism and when we defend ourselves against the dominance, we are additionally faced with a rationale that rejects our protests. We are faced with a discourse of dominance. It is a rationale, an ideology, that portrays dedicated, assertive women as inappropriately pushy, or hostile. That is, it is an ideology which accepts women only as agreeably passive. La mujer does not need to be pushy or hostile, to be seen so by those who feel most threatened by her. Rather, women are embodied with a strength that can and should be utilized in the struggle against the very forces that oppress her.

TOPIC II: DISCUSSION

Many women, in response to the issues raised, expressed the frustrations they experience when attempting to achieve liberation from an oppression that is not only detrimental to women, but to the men as well. For example, women spoke of the defensiveness they encountered from men as a result of disagreeing with them. The hegemonic discourse requires them to be agreeably passive and they are considered out of place if they overstep this boundary. Many women asserted that if they were to achieve their dignity as scholars in a male-dominated world, then it would be necessary to refrain from being agreeably passive and instead assert their presence as thinking individuals. Because this is so challenging to assumptions long held about how the Chicana should behave, such assertion results in conflict.

Some felt that this conflict was a necessary consequence to the shake-up of any status quo. Others were more anxious to make the transition without stepping on any toes.

Some at the panel said that you shouldn't have to confront somebody, that you can make them aware in different ways. When the female audience member was asked in what different ways, she replied, "Don't have anything to do with them."

Another woman said, "How many times have we heard that from whites? How many times have we heard that we shouldn't be so demanding?"

Commentary: The issue, nonetheless, may be seen as one of demand politics versus the politics of appeal. To insist that one approach is better than another is to ignore the complexities of politics. While this particular document will not elaborate on the issues of strategy, it will certainly acknowledge its critical importance in attempts toward progressive change. The point that many were making at the session was that women are currently engaged in many forms of strategy within the movement by women.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

Man: "Part of our reaction is because we have been trained to respond to debate. With a man it is an almost automatic response, 'oh yeah,' well it's a one-upmanship."

--"When you say we as a group, are you saying you as men or you as Chicanos? Who is we?"

--"Women are not allowed to engage in an argument that involves using our training, our ability to argue, our ability to make a point, our ability to respond to someone else's point."

--"Many times what I see with Chicano academicians, and I mean men, is that they have absorbed many of the values of the white academic world and are comfortable, although not completely, in engaging at that level of: 'Oh no, you are wrong...Haven't you looked at what's that study? Aren't you aware of such and such a place?' White men are infinitely more repressed and polite: 'You must not have looked at, or perhaps you have neglected, those kinds of things.' What I am discovering in the Chicana feminist movement is that we are saying that we not only despise that kind of dialogue, but that *we will not do it* and we will call you on it when you do it; and that calling may not come in a form you may want to hear. it may come with a reaction."

* * * * * * * * * * * *

A man said that the notion of confrontation was narrow. There are different kinds of responses and confrontation is one, and necessary under certain kinds of conditions. He further suggests that assertiveness and confrontation may be appropriate in women's attempts to fight for the rights, but that this should not be an attack on the men. "Don't rate it in terms of 'you male chauvinist pig.'" He was, therefore, differentiating between attack and assertiveness.

Commentary: Given the significance of historical and socio-economic factors, it is probably more useful not to "rate sexism in terms of 'you male chauvinist pig.'" The dilemma looms large of how much responsibility to attribute to the individual in light of structural contexts.

The immediate response to his comments: "We're talking about opening up a dialogue without stepping on anybody's toes first, but I never once in my life heard a male say, 'I'm sorry for stepping on your toes.' The men stepped on the toes first. Men are saying if there is a confrontation it is hard to communicate, but there has already been a confrontation."

Another woman added that assertiveness itself is not necessarily effective. "One thing that men aren't willing to do is to take you seriously as an intellectual. For example, when trying to contribute to a discussion, assertiveness does not guarantee that the woman will be taken seriously."

* * * * * * * * * * * *

Panelist: "Men are not aware of sexist acts and that's why they keep committing these sexist acts. If the woman brings this to the attention of men, then she has to pay the consequences, and she pays highly. The men have to want to educate themselves and become more aware. Men have to become aware of their own sexist acts, because men commit them."

Man: "What are those consequences you pay?"

Woman: "We are labeled, the word spreads and we are ostracized from the networks. If a job offer comes up, post doc, if you are too aggressive and too assertive, and possibly threaten the traditional role, you won't get considered. Rarely are qualified Chicanas pushed forward."

Woman: "Yes, there are consequences, but even without confronting men, you still get passed over. It is inexcusable, for example, that a faculty meeting is held to discuss funding possibilities, but the only woman faculty member is excluded.

Woman: "Even with the consequences it is important for us to examine the costs of sexism and the ways in which it hinders the growth of women and of us as a people."

Woman: "What about the kinds of things that women do to women?" Women who have internalized their oppression experience the pains of jealousy, spurred by their insecurities. Women, too, have internalized and accepted the criteria of what a woman is as well as the ideological reinforcement as exemplified by the photo that Gloria presented.

Woman: "There are a lot of unresolved contradictions that we as women have to deal with."

There seems to be a fear that conflict--not confrontation--is unhealthy. Diversity in such settings as the National Hispanic Women's Conference are often ignored. A theme of the conference was to parade around our unity without any sort of substance. Yet questions of gay women and of class were ignored. "There are a number of questions on the agenda for us as women."

* * * * * * * * * * * *

"I'm being forced to sit here. I'm trying, I really am, but I am a male chauvinist pig and I have to try because it even means my job security, literally. I am confused and unsure of myself because women have a wide variety of definitions of sexism. Some women you can get down with, you know, conduct yourself like you would with anyone else. Others you feel like they are hypersensitive and you feel like you have to control yourself. I'm kind of skirting feminist issues, male-female issues, because I'm afraid of screwing up. I haven't got tenure yet. I'm very confused. You see, Chicano men don't just deal with Chicana women who are the doctoral type in academia, but all kinds of women who have different definitions of who they are. Sometimes we run into women who are perfumed very nicely and who dress provocatively, and the pheromones work well, the way they are supposed to. In other words we run into women who want to deal with you like professionals, so we are confused a lot and I wish you had sympathy on us. And not only do we deal with different definitions from Chicanas, but from other women as well. Speaking for myself, I am a very confused individual."

Woman: "I, as a woman, dress for myself."

Woman: "Women also have to deal with many types of Chicano men."

Same man: "I'd almost like to see a list of what you want."

Another man: "You can't respond to your questions with a laundry list. It is a process. It has to be dealt with at every institution and every forum in which we are involved. Let's not only talk about issues of conflict and confrontation at the personal level. but at the level of concrete organizations. We have to discuss forms of dialogue, each campus for itself, that is, a forum by which conflict can be dealt with publicly, with the public forum. This would assist other relations, personal ones as well."

--"I'm a woman and I am confused myself, but I don't use my confusion as a smokescreen."

Man: "It seems to me that a lot of Chicano men in academia will deal with the whole question of sexism from the perspective of wanting a list that they can check off and say, 'Well, I'm not doing this and therefore I'm taking the correct political line.' And part of that is tied into the problem of how we think in certain ways and with a certain logic. That's the way we deal with other men and that's the way we deal with other women. That pattern of thinking itself has to be examined. We can't reduce the question of sexism to something you can quantify, or some kind of model or some kind of simple policy statement. We have to begin to look at where we as men are coming from and what we are feeling and thinking inside of ourselves in regards not only to women but to men also. I see a great deal of resistance to that. I find that most men want to see sexism as a policy decision only and that it is not tied into one's spirit and soul. In terms of men, we have to go back to step one and we have to look at ourselves and try to understand ourselves, and see what is going on inside ourselves and in our relations to people. We have to look at our patterns of thinking and see if we are trying to impose those patterns on someone else. Because we think this way, then we think that everyone else has to, and I think that this assumption is false."

Commentary: In these last few comments we see a wealth of critical issues raised. Many of the men seemed to relate to the exclamations of confusion. Indeed, there are many types of women and not all of these are making feminist claims. Because of variance in definitions of feminism and femininity, many men are confused about how to act toward women. Certainly this kind of confusion is understandable.

However, to ask that this confusion be resolved with a "laundry list" is not only to avoid the responsibility of engaging in the process of discovery, but it is a denial of the complexities of challenging a hegemony based on gender.

The comments of the last man who spoke are insightful and offer a call to action by men genuinely committed to the eradication of a hierarchy falsely based on gender.

It was unfortunate that for reasons of timing, the discussion was cut off at a point where it was particularly enlivened. It was additionally unfortunate that the transition from Topic II to Topic III was not made more smoothly. Nonetheless, we are impressed with the critical importance of issues raised in Topic II.

TOPIC III:

IT IS NOT UNCOMMON THAT OUR INTERESTS AS FEMINISTAS ARE CHALLENGED ON THE BASIS THAT WE ARE SIMPLY FALLING PREY TO THE INTEREST OF WHITE MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN. WE CHALLENGE THE NOTION THAT THERE IS NO ROOM FOR A CHICANA MOVEMENT WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY. WE, AS WOMEN OF COLOR, HAVE A UNIQUE SET OF CONCERNS THAT ARE SEPARATE BOTH FROM WHITE WOMEN AND MEN OF COLOR.

Speaker: Deena González

White women and women of color come to feminism under profoundly different circumstances and with dissimilar issues in mind. What we define and interpret as our circumstances are primarily issues to white women. Therein lies what has come to signify the most crucial point of our divergence. Other distinctions demonstrate our differences, but this particular distinction between issues and circumstances holds great validity.

I discovered feminism largely under the auspices of the white women's movement. Through *MS.* magazine, through group discussions at Women's Centers and Women's Buildings, I came to the conclusion that I was a feminist, in political and social orientation. But only when I came to the realization that I was a Chicana and a Latina feminist did I realize how fundamentally different and often how diametrically opposed my opinions and ideas were to white feminism, in fact, how contradictory they ran to that which white, middle-class feminism was attempting to achieve.

I remember participating in hundreds of hours of conversation with white women, in groups and in friendships, and not being stirred by the things that excited them. I mean, Emma Goldman was important, but she did not bring out in me what she seemed to move in white women, or Jewish women. But when I found other Latinas searching for similar people in our past, in other words, when many of us began to re-capture a history and an identification that existed as it always has, in our communities, then I began to know what it was to admire a person from the past. When I read Julia de Burgos' poetry,

when I read about Luisa Capetillo, when I heard about women's groups in Mexico City, when I learned about Black women and Native American women struggling and fighting, then I felt comfortable. Then, too, I began to develop an analysis whose great contradictions continue to move me toward the kind of intimate liberation that feminism induces. Our first step, however, is that of self-discovery, of recovery, of renewed identification.

Contrary to what has been said and written about us (in or out of academia) we have lost nothing. But we have begun the necessary steps toward re-affirming, in new contexts, what we have always known. For one thing, race and class oppression are our reality, but to white women these are merely issues; "they" do not consistenly encounter themselves in situations like ours. I have come to believe that until white women (and also all men) make our circumstances their own, subconsciously, what concerns us will remain topics for discussion, issues outside of their movements, and ultimately detrimental for their as well as our own liberation.

Neither our feminism nor our liberation depend on any white movement, but our hardest political struggles are pushed forward in alliances, no matter how tenuous or uneasy those might be. A similar parallel could be drawn over how feminism has infiltrated struggles around class. Our first step, however, must necessarily be that of self-discovery, of renewed commitment along with that re-established identification.

TOPIC III: DISCUSSION

The discussion generated by Topic III opened with a series of declarations by women differentiating their needs as women of color from those of white women. These testimonies included explicit descriptions of incidents where women could not relate to aspects of white feminism yet they could clearly identify needs that were specific to women who also encounter oppression due to hegemony based on race.

Some men pointed out that they do have the tendency to see issues of women's liberation as a middle-class set of issues and consequently block out any claims by third world women. "I think that this feeling is alive and well among the men."

The women responded by pointing out that claims for women's liberation are not by any means necessarily bourgeois. Third world women have begun to speak out on issues such as health, poverty, forced sterilization, racism, unemployment, child care, education, abortion rights, etc. We can expect to hear more.

* * * * * * * * * * *

A great amount of work needs to be done in promoting the elevation of women from a status of inferiority and submission to one of dignity and participation. In doing so, we encounter contradictions and dilemmas. This final comment by a woman reminds us of what we must do in spite of these dilemmas.

> If we are going to take seriously the attempts toward social change, then we are going to be in a dilemma. People who don't want to accept the dilemma are basically supporters of the status quo. If we are going to challenge, then we have to accept the dilemma. It doesn't mean we have to remain in a confused state, but we have to clarify what we want for ourselves, accept the dilemma and accept also that it is not easy.

CLOSING REMARKS

Speaker: Teresa Córdova

We have only begun--all of us--to deal with the systematic hegemony--the systematic dominance of men over women. This dominance apears in many forms, at many levels, throughout all realms of our lives. It is not an easy task, there are many issues, many complications, many misunderstandings.

There is first the question of whether there is room for a feminist movement within the Chicano community. Such a question is based, first of all, on the assumption that liberation is a zero-sum commodity; that there is only enough room for some of us to be liberated. It is based on the assumption that hegemony based on race is not related to hegemony based on sex. it is also based on the assumption that we can separate ourselves as Chicano women. It is further based on the assumption that the liberation of women precludes the liberation of our people. It is based on the assumption that women's active participation cannot contribute to the struggle. These assumptions, however, are not based on our reality.

The struggle of our people is better enhanced if we bring ourselves up *together.* The struggle is better enhanced if we struggle *together.* United we stand. Divided we fall.

What is this thing we call sexism? It is like racism in many ways. It is both blatant and subtle. it is both psychological and institutionalized. There is "a systematic body of knowledge that oppresses" Chicanas. We need to identify both a Chiconology and a Chicanalogy*--whether we call it that or not. We have here today begun to enumerate together *the assumptions, the actions,* and *the consequences* of dominance by men over women.

As we continue to do this, the process unfolds. It is important to emphasize that it is a process. Like any other process, there are dynamics--the most striking to us is what happens when we raise these

*This is a reference to the work presented at the conference by Francisco Vasquez from Loyola Marymount.

issues to our men. Most typically we are reacted to as though we are trying to cut off something. We are not. We are not castrating. We are not bitches. We are not insignificant and we are not stupid. We *are* working together towards the liberation of all of us. What is in it for the women, is in it for the men--cooperation, humanization, friendship, and liberation.

It is crucial, we agree, that situationally confronting the issues is ideal. When "sexism" occurs, we need to deal with it. That is, the time to assert a right is when that right is denied. To do this is something both men and women seem to agree is important. This is the ideal, an ideal that we collectively have yet to achieve. Remember what happens when women do raise these issues. The men become defensive and the women are defined as uppity or insolent. What is really being said is that women have overstepped their boundaries. The point is, achieving this ideal is a process--a process that collectively we can effectively develop.

There is also the question of whether we are a co-opted product of the white feminist movement. There are charges that we are being used. Neither of these points have been proven. What has been proven is that we, as Chicanas, experience oppression as women and as Chicanas. We cannot separate the two. There are, therefore, significant divergences between us and white women--differences of race and of class. Similarly, to us and Chicano men, the issue of gender is significant.

There is a further issue that we have emphasized to many of you and wish to emphasize here again--the issues of intentionality. it is not necessary that one intends to act in a way that has hegemonic consequences. More often that not, the intention is not there. However, intention or not, the consequences remain. The point is, the pernicious assumptions and stereotypical understandings about Chicana women are deeply rooted. These assumptions and understandings have been perpetuated and sustained through history--La Malinche is a case in point. It is easy to operate on these assumptions and act accordingly. It is these assumptions, however, which comprise the systematic body of knowledge that serves to oppress us--men and women.

People act on the assumptions under which they were socialized. The point that we are making is that many of these underlying assumptions have served as the basis for a hierarchical structure that places

men on top, women on the bottom. We challenge this on the basis that it is hierarchical and therefore requires that someone be on the bottom.

We know this is difficult for the men--it is even more difficult for us.

Concluding Commentary: If the success of this panel can be judged in terms of its goals, then we can say that it was indeed a success for all those involved. First we wished to "generate discussion around significant issues of gender inequality that appeared unsettled." Not only did people respond during the panel to issues raised, but the discussion is continuing throughout the remainder of the conference and beyond. The resulting excitement of both men and women was an assurance that there are many who are committed to continuing the struggle to break down the systematic relegation of women to inferior status and submission. Secondly, we wish to "generate suggestions of action to remedy the problems that women in NACS face in their attempts to be recognized as serious scholars." There were numerous points throughout the panel when concrete suggestions were offered for action. For example, it was suggested that the question of sexism in NACS be raised in the plenary session. It was also suggested that we must actively promote the involvement of women in administrative posts within the organization. Additionally, a group of men decided to formally continue the discussion at the next NACS 1983 conference in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

The upward struggle for our rights as women of color continue. Our voices are becoming stronger and cannot be silenced. There are many men who are joining the struggle. Together we shall work for the eradication of a dehumanizing system of dominance.

337508

THEOLOGY LIBRARY
CLAREMONT, CALIF.